Provincial Patterns of Alice Munro and Ruskin Bond's Select Short Stories: A Comparative Analysis

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Introduction

Literature reveals life's intricacies and aims to entertain and enlighten people. Scott Fitzgerald, cited by Micaela English on Town and Country's website, aptly noted, "That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong." Through various forms like novels, short stories, essays, and dramas, English literature resonates with humanity, forging a profound connection by portraying diverse emotions. The emergence of the short story in the late nineteenth century reshaped literary exploration, impacting Canadian writing, though Canadian short story writers, including Isabella Valancy Crawford, Susan Frances Harrison, and Ernest Thompson, struggled to gain the same acclaim as their American and British counterparts.

Canadian short stories, propelled by Morley Callaghan in the 1920s, gained global recognition, though initially facing challenges. Narrating short stories demands creativity and skill, often beginning with a problem and concluding with a solution. Both Canadian and Indian short stories share many universal storytelling qualities despite their cultural differences, depicting diverse societies and landscapes. Indian short fiction, evolving similarly as its Western counterpart, features early animal-centric Sanskrit tales. Indian English short stories emerged in the late 19th century, with notable contributions from authors like Shoshee Chunder Dutta and Cornelia Sorabji. Post-independence, South Indian authors continued to enrich the genre with tales rooted in local folklore and addressing societal themes.

Alice Munro

Alice Ann Munro, the 2013 Nobel Prize winner in Literature, is a Canadian short-story writer born on July 10, 1931, in Ontario, Canada. Most of her fiction is set in her native Huron County in Southwestern Ontario, delving into human complexities with an uncomplicated prose style. Munro's narrative terrain often centres on specific geographical locations, particularly rural Ontario, offering social maps of small-town life while also exploring socially unspeakable events, or 'Open Secrets.' Her stories reveal the pleasure of simultaneously witnessing two worlds: the mundane and the shadowy realm of secrets. Cynthia Ozick aptly described her as 'Our Chekhov,' highlighting Munro's status as one of the greatest contemporary writers of fiction.

Ruskin Bond

Ruskin Bond, the celebrated short story writer born on May 19th, 1934, in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, extensively explores provincial and ecological life in his work. Renowned for his nature-centric approach, Bond's narratives intricately delve into the fabric of trees, animals, birds, and insects, reflecting his heightened environmental sensibilities. He holds the distinction of introducing children to literature's enchanting world and often infuses his works with an ego-centric perspective, as seen in his statement from the introduction to *The Night Train at Deoli* (1988): "I prefer to write about the people and places I have known" (XII).

Thesis Statement

Amidst urban dominance, this research analyses representations of small-town existence in short stories by two writers from different continents. Through this exploration, it aims to uncover similarities between these societies, providing insight into the overlooked facets of small-town life in contrast to the urban- centric narratives.

Objectives

- To scrutinise the representation of provincial life in chosen literary works by Alice Munro.
- To investigate the portrayal of provincial life in selected works authored by Ruskin Bond.
- To conduct a comparative analysis of the depiction of provincial life in Canadian and Indian contexts by examining the literary contributions of Alice Munro and Ruskin Bond.
- To identify and examine similarities in the writing styles employed by Alice Munro and Ruskin Bond as they depict provincial life in their respective works.

Parameters, Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Primary Texts

There are twenty-nine short stories selected for this study from the following collections: Alice Munro's *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), *The Progress of Love* (1986), *Runaway* (2004), *Too Much Happiness* (2009), and *Dear Life* (2012), along with Ruskin Bond's *The Night Train at Deoli* (1988), *Time Stops at Shamli* (1989), *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* (1991), and *The Essential Collection for Young Readers* (2015). These collections serve as the primary texts for the research.

Methodology

The research is framed within specific parameters drawn from influential works in Comparative Literature and literary theory. Susan Basnett's *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, particularly chapters such as "Introduction: What is Comparative Literature Today," "How Comparative Literature Came into Being," and "Beyond the Frontiers of Europe: Alternative Concepts of Comparative Literature," establish foundational

understanding. Additionally, Dr. S. Chellaiah's insights from *Comparative Literature: Its Theory and Practice* inform the study, alongside Ihab Hassan's "Parallelism" theory. Furthermore, the analysis integrates Louise M. Rosenblatt's transactional model from *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, focusing on "Efferent and Aesthetic Reading," to explore the nuances in the selected short stories. Additionally, adherence to the MLA 9th Edition citation guidelines supplements the methodology.

Structure of the Thesis

The research work has been divided into five chapters. Chapter I, titled "Introduction," begins with a meticulous exploration of the introduction of Canadian and Indian fiction, tracing their growth and historical trajectories. The narrative then shifts to contemporary authors Alice Munro and Ruskin Bond, who are pivotal in understanding the evolution of short fiction. A thorough examination of their personal and creative lives follows, presenting concise yet insightful biographies. Notable works such as Munro's *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), *The Progress of Love* (1986), *Runaway* (2004), *Too Much Happiness* (2009), *Dear Life* (2012), and Bond's *The Night Train at Deoli* (1988), *Time Stops at Shamli* (1989), *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* (1991), and *The Essential Collection for Young Readers* (2015) are briefly discussed, providing a thematic introduction to the short stories. Subsequently, the chapter delves into a comprehensive literature review, identifying research gaps in the existing body of work. Following this, the thesis statement is articulated, providing a focused lens for the subsequent analysis. The theoretical framework is then introduced, establishing a conceptual basis for the research. Finally, the chapter meticulously lays out the research objectives, ensuring a structured foundation for the ensuing scholarly exploration.

In Chapter II, titled “Ontario’s Small-town Shades,” the exploration centres on selected short stories by Alice Munro, totalling fourteen, drawn from her collections: *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), *The Progress of Love* (1986), *Runaway* (2004), *Too Much Happiness* (2009), and *Dear Life* (2012). Emphasizing the theme of provincial life in Canada, the analysis delves into a thorough examination of the subject, with a specific focus on the chosen short stories from the aforementioned anthologies. The chapter relies on the transactional model for analysis, to aid in understanding the narratives in the context of provincial lives.

The provincial analysis portrays various themes, including the exploration of social institutions and interpersonal dynamics, livelihood concerns, inner and outer landscapes shaping characters, the symbolism of nature, the contrast between urban and small-town life, the theme of interconnectedness and shared responsibilities within communities, conflicts between personal desires and societal norms, and the complexities of relationships and familial bonds. This examination offers a deep understanding of Munro’s storytelling and the overarching themes that define her work.

Chapter III, titled “Himalayan Hues,” embarks on a scholarly exploration of the theme of provincial life in India, drawing upon Ruskin Bond’s poignant short stories. Employing the Transactional Model as a theoretical framework, this chapter meticulously analyses a curated selection of fifteen short stories extracted from Bond’s well-known collections: *The Night Train at Deoli* (1988), *Time Stops at Shamli* (1989), *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* (1991), and *The Essential Collection for Young Readers* (2015). Through rigorous examination, the chapter endeavours to unravel the intricacies and subtleties of provincial existence as depicted within Bond’s literary narratives.

This chapter exemplifies the depth and richness of Ruskin Bond's literary contributions within the realm of scholarly research. These narratives, drawn from iconic collections spanning several decades, offer profound insights into provincial existence. As the scholarly journey unfolds, the chapter navigates through a diverse range of themes intricately interwoven into Bond's narratives. Central to this scholarly endeavour is the exploration of various provincial themes, ranging from the evocation of Reminiscence & Nostalgia to the portrayal of harmonious relationships between humanity and nature. Additionally, the chapter delves into themes such as bridging generations, fostering a sense of community, embracing simplicity and contentment, navigating the unhurried pace of life, and celebrating the resilience of rooted communities.

Chapter IV, titled “Munro and Bond – Parallel Palettes,” embarks on a comparative exploration, juxtaposing analyses of provincial life in Canada and India from preceding chapters. The chapter commences with an introduction to the American School of comparative literature and analysis. Guided by the theory of Comparative Analysis, it delves into themes of provincial life in both contexts. This chapter meticulously scrutinizes and compares the narrative styles of the respective authors, shedding light on various concepts related to provincial life.

The analysis extends to the authors’ distinctive narrative styles and other elements associated with provincial life, employing the Parallel Analysis theory. This theoretical approach becomes instrumental in dissecting common provincial themes such as Memories, Nature, Gardens, Animals, Small-town Settings, and Small-profile Jobs. By applying the theory of parallel Analysis, the chapter seeks to unravel the shared threads within these themes, extracting insights from literature across diverse contexts.

The final chapter, “Conclusion,” serves as a culmination of the preceding chapters, emphasizing the relevance and merits of the theoretical framework. It presents an analysis of

research findings, highlighting the pivotal role of human values, affinity to nature, and gender roles in small-town life. Comparative Literature Theory and Comparative Analysis are instrumental in broadening the research scope, enabling the exploration of themes across cultural boundaries and exposing urban living limitations.

Moreover, the scholarly investigation underscores the advantages of small-town lifestyles, emphasizing communal living experiences and connections with nature. Tight-knit communities foster deep bonds, offering a sense of belonging unmatched in urban settings. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further studies, providing a roadmap for future research endeavours in this field.

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Publications

S. No	Article	Journal	Other Details Vol/No/Page No/ Year	Published in UGC-CARE / Scopus Indexed/ Web of Science
1	Small- Town Chronicles: Exploring Alice Munro's Intimate Worlds	*IIS University Journal of Arts* IISN: 2319-5339 (P), 25837591 (O)	Vol. 12, Issue 3 & 4, Oct- Nov 2023, pp. 162-174	UGC CARE Group I
2	Village Vistas and City Chronicles: Rural- Urban Lifestyle Perspectives	*Inclusive* E-ISSN: 2278-9758	Vol. II, No. 24, December 2023 – January 2024, pp. 229-245	UGC CARE Group I